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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 001462

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, EB, DS, AND INR
STATE PASS TO USTR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [PINR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-CAFTA PROTEST ANTICLIMACTIC

¶1. Only 100-200 protesters turned out on June 18 to voice their opposition to CAFTA negotiations, signaling that there is little focused, popular resistance in Honduras to the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The demonstration, which so far has been the only organized protest to occur during this round of talks, went on for less than two hours outside the conference hotel and ended after lead Honduran CAFTA negotiator Melvin Redondo met with protest leaders.

¶2. EmbOffs, having received notice by e-mail had alerted delegates by mid-day that there would be an afternoon protest in front of the main entrance of the Clarion hotel. By 4:00 p.m. the protest was underway, with demonstrators blocking traffic in front of the hotel and carrying ten-foot-tall red banners denouncing CAFTA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The protest was organized by the Popular Block (PB), a left-leaning organization that claims to represent teachers and workers, whose leader, Carlos H. Reyes, read a declaration to the press. Congresswoman Doris Gutierrez, who belongs to the small Democratic Unification Party (a remnant of the 1980s socialist movement), also addressed demonstrators.

¶3. Eyewitnesses estimate that police outnumbered protesters 2-1, with uniformed officers surrounding the entire hotel. The police nearest to the demonstration wore helmets, carried riot shields, and were armed with batons rather than firearms. The protest subsided after lead Honduran CAFTA negotiator Melvin Redondo met with protest leaders and received a list of their grievances.

¶4. COMMENT: The lone anti-CAFTA protest during this round of negotiations turned out to be a non-event. The small number of demonstrators stopped traffic on one street and delivered their standard anti-free trade message, but talks were not impeded in any way. This level of protest indicates that here in Tegucigalpa CAFTA is an issue too nebulous to inspire extensive resistance, and attests to the lack of widespread, organized opposition to CAFTA in Honduras. In a conversation with LabAtt June 19, labor leader Dinora Aceituno (CTH Secretary General) dismissed the demonstration as ineffective and counterproductive. END COMMENT
Palmer